

**State Board of Education  
February 16, 2010  
Item I**

**Team:** Secondary School Transformation Team

**Discussion Topic:** Vermont's work with the New England Secondary Schools Consortium (NESSC)

**Alignment with Goals:**

Goal I: Establish high-quality, research-based teaching and learning practices to continually improve achievement for all learners.

Goal II: Provide and promote high-quality, transformative educational leadership

Goal V: Establish a coherent state and local policy structure that promotes the educational practices and student outcomes demonstrated in research as essential for student success in the 21st century.

**Statutory Authority:** Not applicable

**Background Information:**

Encompassing Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC) is a pioneering educational partnership committed to fostering forward-thinking innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education across the New England region. The Consortium's bold goal is to ensure that by 2016 every public high school student in the five partner states receive an education that will prepare them for college, career, and civic responsibility in the interconnected global community of the 21st century.

Recognizing that national borders no longer define the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that students need for success, the Consortium will support the development of a new generation of high-performing, internationally competitive schools that will re-define the traditional concept of the American high school to better mirror the lives and learning needs of today's students.

These transformed schools will no longer be limited by building design, geography, or educational convention, but will be flexible, borderless, multidimensional community learning centers that blend secondary and postsecondary educational experiences. Students will conduct research in their communities, acquire real-world skills through challenging internships, take online and on-campus college courses, use powerful new technologies to access the world, and engage in other innovative learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

The Consortium is funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the largest philanthropy in New England focused exclusively on education, and coordinated by Great Schools Partnership, a nonprofit educational-support organization in Portland, Maine. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation has committed \$1 million to support the initial 18 months of the Consortium's work, which includes a \$500,000 partnership grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Purpose of Discussion:**

Update the Board

**Cost Implications:**

Vermont Department of Education staff work with the consortium to accomplish mutual goals. In the coming months and years, there will be need for more staff to accomplish the work.

**Staff Available:**

Armando Vilaseca

Rae Ann Knopf

John Fischer

Carol Duley

Tina Muncy

**VT SSC Council:** Carol Duley, Rae Ann Knopf, Kathy Larsen, Armando Vilaseca, Peter Peltz, Tami Esjberg, Tina Muncy, Amy Cole, David Coriell)

The New England Secondary School Consortium is a pioneering educational partnership committed to fostering forward-thinking innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education across the New England region. The five partner states of Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont believe our bold vision, common mission, and innovative approach will empower us to close persistent achievement gaps, promote greater educational equity and opportunity for all students, and lead our educators and schools into a new era.

While maintaining fidelity to our vision, mission, and objectives, the Consortium's *Declaration of Commitment* is an aspirational "living document" that will be periodically revisited and refined to reflect emerging needs and contexts.

To realize our vision, we affirm our collective commitment to the following objectives and strategies:

- 1. Transform secondary schooling:** The Consortium will transform—from the statehouse to the schoolhouse—educational policies, assessment practices, teaching strategies, professional development, and state and local leadership to ensure that the educational performance and attainment of our public high school students will not only be competitive with their peers worldwide, but that every student graduates prepared for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 2. Achieve five ambitious objectives:** By 2016, the Consortium will (1) increase four-year, on-time graduation rates across the five states to ninety percent or higher; (2) decrease annual drop-out rates to less than one percent; (3) increase the percentage of students enrolling in two- or four-year college-degree programs or pursuing accredited postsecondary credentials; (4) reduce the number of students required to take remedial courses during their first year of college to five percent or less; and (5) engage postsecondary institutions, organizations, and colleagues in a collaborative effort to ensure that more students enroll in and complete postsecondary education.
- 3. Build public will for change:** The Consortium will foster a coordinated regional effort to build broad-based support for its major initiatives among educators, policy makers, and business leaders, while also engaging parents and community members in the educational process through positive messaging, cross-state networking, and community outreach.
- 4. Co-adopt 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning standards:** The Consortium will develop and co-adopt a set of integrated, forward-thinking learning standards that reflect the ways in which our youth will live, work, learn, and lead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These standards will define the academic, cognitive, interpersonal, self-directional, and real-world knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that can be applied throughout a student's life and across all educational, career, and civic contexts.
- 5. Reshape educational policy:** The Consortium will conduct an extensive review of the legislation, regulations, and rules governing secondary education across the five partner states. The resulting policy map and high-leverage policy framework will help to guide the development of new state and local policies designed to stimulate educational innovation and creativity, coordinate the implementation of new models of teaching and learning, ensure the personalized support every student needs to succeed, and clarify performance expectations for educators and students.
- 6. Accurately measure student learning:** The Consortium will explore, promote, and implement the use of performance assessments and standards-based grading practices that more accurately

measure student learning. By moving beyond course credits, grade averaging, and other conventional measures used to determine educational achievement, these proven practices will encourage teachers to personalize, diversify, and strengthen their repertoire of instructional strategies to more effectively engage students and close persistent achievement gaps.

- 7. Ensure international competitiveness:** The Consortium will undertake a wide-ranging evaluation of learning standards, course content, organizational structures, school leadership, teaching strategies, professional development, and student outcomes in relation to the world's highest-performing countries, educational systems, and schools. Recognizing that national borders no longer define the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that students need for success, this work will apply the characteristics of effective 21<sup>st</sup>-century education to the creation of new models of teaching, learning, and leading.
- 8. Create versatile learning models:** The Consortium will work with educators in the field to develop innovative, internationally competitive learning models and programs at the secondary level, beginning with the transformation of a core group of high schools in each of the five partner states. No longer limited by building design, geography, or educational convention, these high-performing schools will be versatile community learning centers that prioritize individual learning needs, blend secondary and postsecondary experiences, provide engaging educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and offer a variety of student-designed pathways to graduation—all while emphasizing critical thinking, global understanding, multicultural awareness, technological literacy, real-world applications, and other challenging 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and proficiencies.
- 9. Build collaborative networks:** The Consortium will create new in-state and cross-state networks comprising state agencies, support organizations, postsecondary institutions, districts, and schools that will share resources and expertise in pursuit of our common mission. The five partner states will also collaborate with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the New England Board of Higher Education, and other organizations to bring greater coordination, consensus, and alignment to the promotion of best practices and common learning expectations across the New England region.

[newenglandssc.org](http://newenglandssc.org)

August 2009

## Our Vision

The New England Secondary School Consortium envisions every adolescent in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont graduating from a new generation of high-performing, internationally competitive high schools prepared for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of our interconnected global society.

By building equitable systems of public secondary education in each of our states, we envision the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that were once the possession of a few becoming the universal standard for all. Our students will not only be proficient in the traditional academic disciplines, but they will be creative thinkers, adaptable workers, and informed citizens equipped to face the diverse challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We see our traditional public high schools evolving into versatile community learning centers that prioritize individual learning needs above other concerns, blend secondary and postsecondary experiences, provide engaging educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and offer a variety of student-designed pathways to graduation—all while emphasizing global understanding, multicultural awareness, technological literacy, real-world applications, and other demanding 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and proficiencies.

As we forge ambitious, forward-thinking partnerships among states, educational organizations, postsecondary institutions, and schools to leverage resources and expertise in pursuit of our common mission, we envision a fundamental cultural shift taking hold in the hearts and minds of our educators, policy makers, parents, and citizens as the traditional concept of the American high school is redefined to mirror the lives, interests, and learning needs of today's students.

## Our Mission

The New England Secondary School Consortium develops, supports, and promotes bold educational innovations that will empower the next generation of citizens, workers, and leaders to be prosperous, knowledgeable, and responsible participants in our global community.